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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, December 19, 2007

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Dad not guilty in girl's death

Posted by [Danielle Quisenberry](#) | [Jackson Citizen Patriot](#)

December 19, 2007 09:10AM

While the family of a Jackson man acquitted of murder celebrated, the family of the slain girl's mom sobbed.

"They are in pain. We are in pain," said Nancy Brower, the mother of Paul Brower, 26, who Tuesday was found not guilty of suffocating to death Victoria Brower, 3. "We are all outraged by this."

After a four-day trial and about 13 hours of deliberation, 12 jurors acquitted Brower on charges of first-degree murder, felony murder and first-degree child abuse.

Nancy Brower and her friends and family embraced Tuesday, applauding a jury that did not convict a man they've insisted is innocent. But they said they are angry the woman they allege killed Victoria -- the girl's stepmother, Trina Brower -- remains free.

Victoria's maternal family members, convinced Paul Brower should have been found guilty, are devastated the jurors didn't see it their way. Victoria's mother, Jessica Jewell, collapsed in her mother's arms when she heard the verdict. Jewell had lost custody of Victoria in a default judgment.

"We are just floored that he can get away with this," said HESSIE Shepherd of Munith, Victoria's great-grandmother.

Jurors said there was not enough evidence to convince them beyond reasonable doubt that Brower killed his daughter.

"What kept running through my mind was that if there is anything worse than the murder of this young girl, it was to convict an innocent man -- especially the father of that same girl," juror Bill Chapel of Parma said in a telephone interview.

Circuit Judge John McBain, who presided, said he, too, was not convinced.

"I certainly would have had some difficulty myself," McBain told the attorneys and families after he dismissed the jurors. "The jury struggled for a long time and did exactly what a jury should do."

The prosecution argued Brower, angry with Victoria for wetting her pants and putting holes in the walls, killed her in her bed July 24 or 25 at their W. Biddle Street apartment. A medical examiner ruled the death a homicide, saying she died of asphyxia by suffocation.

The defense pointed the finger at Brower's wife, Trina Brower. She was a key prosecution witness who was called a liar during defense testimony.

Brower, elated by his freedom and standing outside the courthouse Tuesday smoking his first cigarette in months, said he plans to divorce Trina Brower as soon as possible.

He said he and his family are convinced she was involved in his daughter's death. He called the investigation into her killing "lousy."

"People who knew me as a father knew Victoria was my life," he said. As he spoke, he pulled a picture of the girl out of his pocket.

Defense lawyer Bruce Barton suggested during the trial police and prosecutors focused on Paul Brower alone without fully investigating Trina Brower. "I call this a tunnel-vision case," he said.

Assistant Prosecutor Allison Bates said Paul Brower, and not Trina Brower, abused Victoria and later suffocated her.

"Unfortunately, the rules of evidence do not allow the jury to have access to all the evidence available to police and prosecutors," Bates said.

Brower admitted to police in taped interviews shown at the trial that he was angry and struck Victoria in the face and head.

Still, he was a good father, said Nancy Brower.

Jackson County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer said the prosecutor's office will review the case, but likely will not pursue charges against Trina Brower.

"We charged the man with what we were satisfied was the correct charge against the correct person with the right reason," Blumer said.

It was the second straight non-guilty verdict in a child murder case in Jackson County.

In October, Circuit Judge Chad Schmucker acquitted former Brooklyn resident Crystal Richardson-Poster in the smothering death of her 9-month-old daughter, McKenzie Zukowski.

In the latest case, Brower said he felt bad about disciplining Victoria as he did. "She was a very good little girl," he said.

With the trial over, he said he plans to live with his parents in Munith, spend time with his family and visit his daughter's grave for the first time.

The time he spent in jail, which he said cost him his job and home, was "devastating," he said.

"We lost our granddaughter and we lost our son for a while," Nancy Brower said. "It has been a nightmare of monumental proportions."

-- Staff writer Steven Hepker contributed to this report.

Mother not allowed to see daughter who accused husband of rape

December 18, 2007

By JOHN WISELY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A West Bloomfield mother accused of child abuse can visit her son but not her autistic daughter, who has accused the woman's husband of rape, a judge ruled today in Pontiac.

Oakland County Family Court Judge Joan Young agreed to allow the mother to spend an hour each week with her son in a supervised setting after a court-appointed guardian for the children said it could be for the son, who has been removed from his home since his father was accused of raping his autistic sister.

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"I think it would be reassuring to (him) to see his mother," said Abbie Shuman. "He's not doing great with this."

The Free Press is not naming the family to protect the identity of an alleged rape victim.

The case stems from the 14-year-old girl's accusation that her father raped her repeatedly since she was 6 and her mother refused to intervene. The girl is autistic and cannot speak.

She made the accusation through a controversial technique known as facilitated communication, in which an aide helps a nonverbal student type thoughts into a computer keyboard. Courts have disallowed testimony taken by such means and many academics dismiss it, saying the words of the patient cannot be distinguished from those of the facilitator.

The husband remains jailed on charges of rape and child abuse. The mother is free on personal bond, charged with child abuse as well.

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WEST BLOOMFIELD

Charged with abuse, mom is allowed to visit her son

December 19, 2007

BY JOHN WISELY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A West Bloomfield couple accused of rape and child abuse involving their autistic daughter won a round in family court Tuesday when a judge agreed to let the girl's mother visit her son in a supervised setting.

Family Court Judge Joan Young also ordered Oakland County prosecutors to give defense attorneys a copy of a taped interview at Care House, in which their 14-year-old daughter accused her father of rape. The girl is autistic and does not speak.

Advertisement

She made the accusation using a controversial technique known as facilitated communication, where an aide helps a student type words on a keyboard.

Oakland County prosecutors want to terminate the couple's custody and objected to the visitation. The father is jailed on first-degree criminal sexual conduct and child abuse charges. The mother is free on bond and charged with child abuse and witness intimidation. The daughter is in foster care, and the son is staying with an aunt. The Free Press is not naming the family to protect the identity of the daughter, a potential rape victim.

The reliability of facilitated communication will be key to both cases. Defense attorneys are challenging it.

A hearing in the custody case is set for Feb. 5, after the preliminary examination in the criminal case.

"I believe the criminal case will resolve" the custody case, said Jerome Sabbota, the father's lawyer.

Contact **JOHN WISELY** at 248-351-3696 or jwisely@freepress.com.

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Step up to save children

December 19, 2007

BY The Hon. MAURA CORRIGAN

James Earl Bradley Jr. and Isaac Lethbridge.

If you recognize these names, it's probably because you've read them in the pages of this newspaper. What also makes these names memorable is that they belong to children killed by those who should have been protecting and caring for them.

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Last year, 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge was beaten to death at a Detroit foster home. Three-year-old James Earl Bradley Jr. died last April from a beating at a foster home in Van Buren Township.

These were preventable tragedies. Twelve days before Isaac was killed, social service workers saw him with two black eyes and bruises all over his body but failed to report their observations. Within days after James Bradley's death, his foster mother's day care was shut down for previous violations of the Child Care Organizations Act.

There are other children who die in state care, some by violence and some by bureaucratic unresponsiveness; I met with two foster mothers who told me their children died from cancer because the state bureaucracy did not approve chemotherapy in time. Many deaths of children in state care could have been prevented. Yet we not only have failed to stop these deaths -- we don't even have reliable information about how many die and why.

In Michigan, child deaths are reported by the Department of Community Health, the Child Death Review Team Program, the Department of Human Services, the children's ombudsman, and a national project called Kids Count. Each of these entities uses a different standard in counting child deaths, and their published statistics are grouped into different age categories. As a result, their statistics don't match, and a comparison of their figures doesn't provide a clear conclusion on how many children have died in state care in any given year.

Our second challenge, once we have that information, is finding effective ways to share it. The children's ombudsman has the power to conduct an inquiry into the death of a child in state care, yet there is no requirement for notifying the ombudsman of these deaths.

Michigan has five avenues of review of deaths of children in state care, and each of these death review teams addresses important issues and collects valuable data. But we have no statutory framework for mandating they collaborate with one another.

The results: duplication of effort, limited vision, and frustration. Also, courts are not included on these local death review teams, and these teams do not ordinarily obtain court records as part of their review. This is a serious gap in information sharing.

We in the child welfare system must and can do better.

First, we need an independent investigative oversight body focused on the problem of children dying in state care. This group should extend across all three branches of state government and should have access to the information collected by existing child death review entities. It should identify specific causes and systemic problems that contribute to the risk of child mortality. This group also should make comprehensive recommendations for prevention.

Second, for the same reasons, we need a single repository of information concerning children who have died in state care. The inquiry should include children who have died in foster care, children who have died after being under court jurisdiction, and children who have died after having any contact with child protective services. We need to know how many have died, how they died, and whether each death could have been prevented.

Third, we need to increase collaboration among the agencies that currently review child deaths. In particular, we need a law that requires the Department of Human Services to notify the children's ombudsman whenever a child has died in foster care. We also need legislation to permit DHS, the ombudsman and the courts to share child death information with each other.

Fourth, we need to bring the judiciary to the child death review teams. We should routinely include court records in the death review process and add judges to state and local death review teams. As a first step, the Family Services Division of the State Court Administrative Office has established a Child Death Review Committee within the judicial branch. This committee's work will be advanced if the Legislature authorizes the Department of Human Services and children's ombudsman to share case-specific information with the Child Death Review Committee.

James Earl Bradley Jr. and Isaac Lethbridge. Too many others. We will have failed these children a second time if we do not act to prevent other children's deaths.

MAURA D. CORRIGAN is a justice of the Michigan Supreme Court. Write to her in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226 or at oped@freepress.com.

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Article published Dec 19, 2007

EDITORIAL

Foster care licensees face criminal history checks

Providers of foster care are entrusted with some of our most vulnerable citizens. Foster care homes often welcome children whose backgrounds include terrible neglect and abuse. Likewise, residents of foster care group facilities frequently have disabilities that make them easy prey for those seeking to do harm.

That is why it is important that foster care facilities provide environments where residents can feel safe and secure. Unfortunately, that does not always happen.

To help prevent foster care residents from being victimized, Michigan lawmakers have approved a new law to require criminal background checks in order to become licensed as a foster care provider.

The new law amends the state's child care licensing act to require an applicant for a license to operate a foster care home or a foster care group home, or anyone seeking to renew a license, to undergo a criminal history check. This would include looking into FBI records and a Department of State Police ICHAT (Internet criminal history access tool) check. Anyone found to have been convicted of an offense listed under the Sex Offenders Registration Act would be prohibited from receiving a license.

In addition, all adult residents of a licensed home would have to undergo an ICHAT check by Jan. 1, 2009.

Licensees also are required under the new law to report to the Michigan Department of Human Services within three days after an employee or an adult residing in the home was arraigned for a felony or misdemeanor that is listed in the bill.

As part of the licensing process, applicants' fingerprints would be submitted to the Michigan State Police database and automatic notification would be provided if they match prints from a subsequent arrest. It would then be up to the Department of Human Service to contact the foster care home and take appropriate action.

Such steps are not unreasonable. Criminal background checks are required of school employees and day care providers. Why not foster care licensees? Once a licensee undergoes a check, he or she would not be required to undergo another check if they remain continuously licensed.

These are common-sense measures aimed at ensuring the safety of foster care residents, many of whom are often defenseless.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Son finds birth mom is a Lowe's co-worker

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

Gazette News Service

GRAND RAPIDS -- For years, Steve Flaig, a delivery truck driver at a Lowe's store here, had searched for his birth mother.

He found her working the cash register at the front of the store.

For several months, he and Christine Tallady had known each other casually as co-workers. Friday, they met for the first time as mother and son.

"I have a complete family now, all my kids," said Tallady, who has two younger children. "It's a perfect time of year. It's the best Christmas present ever."

For Flaig, it was the reunion he had dreamed of for much of his 22 years. He had always known he was adopted, and his parents, Pat and Lois Flaig, who raised him, supported his decision to search for his birth mother.

It was a tough decision for Tallady, unmarried at the time, to give him up, but "I wasn't ready to be a mother," she said. She left the adoption record open, figuring he might want to contact her someday.

When Flaig turned 18, he asked the agency that arranged his adoption for his background information. A couple of months later, it came, including his birth mother's name. Finally, using the Internet, he found the connection with Tallady.

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Published December 19, 2007

Boy, 14, gets 1-day sentence for friend's accidental killing

Morning update

Associated Press

HOWELL - A 14-year-old Livingston County boy has received a one-day juvenile sentence for accidentally shooting his best friend to death.

Probate Judge Carol Hackett Garagiola in Howell also ordered the teen to get counseling and perform community service for the first year of his two-year probation. The Livingston County Daily Press & Argus and The Ann Arbor News didn't release his name.

The Iosco Township youth earlier pleaded guilty to careless discharge of a firearm causing death.

Police say the boy and 14-year-old Timothy Holmes were inside the boy's house April 14 when he retrieved his father's Colt .45 semiautomatic pistol. They say the boy was showing Holmes the gun when it fired.

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Teen gets lengthy term for sex crimes

By SCOTT AIKEN
H-P Staff Writer

December 18, 2007

ST. JOSEPH — In a courtroom crowded with parents and friends of his victims, a teenager convicted of sexually assaulting two boys after enticing them to his home and holding them prisoner was sentenced Monday to a minimum of 23 years and 9 months in prison and a maximum of 80 years. Gideon Falcone inflicted psychological damage on the victims that might scar them for life, Berrien County Trial Court Judge Dennis Wiley said before imposing the sentence.

The 15-year-old Falcone, himself an abuse victim, had been through the juvenile court system for previous attacks on children. The court intervention failed, Wiley said, and Falcone, left to his own devices without proper supervision, ratcheted up the level of violence against others.

“A perfect storm occurred here,” the judge said.



FALCONE

Falcone, who lived with his grandparents in New Troy, pleaded guilty earlier to one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and one count of second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

The victims, ages 11 and 12, were among four boys who prosecutors say were physically and sexually assaulted after being lured to the residence on Aug. 14. The father of two of the boys said the people responsible for Falcone's upbringing “should be ashamed.” He said his sons will have a difficult time trusting people in the future.

“How can somebody be so sick at such a young age?” the man told Falcone. “They should have done something a long time ago and maybe you wouldn’t be spending the rest of your life in prison.”

Falcone’s father, John Falcone, is serving a 2-to 10-year prison sentence for assault with intent to do great bodily harm. His mother is in jail in Kent County, authorities said.

The mother of another sexual assault victim asked Wiley to impose the maximum sentence allowed. Assistant Prosecutor Jeff Rhoa said some parents were unable to address the court, and the father of one victim died as the result of events put in motion by Falcone’s assaults.

“He couldn’t accept the fact that his son was sexually assaulted by another boy,” Rhoa said.

Rhoa said that around the time of Falcone’s initial hearing in juvenile court, the father started drinking excessively, and he later fell in the bathroom, hit his head and died.

Rhoa said he does not dispute mitigating factors in Falcone’s background pointed out by defense lawyer Edwin Hettinger, such as absent parents and abuse. But even after nearly two years of treatment in the juvenile system, Falcone resumed a violent pattern, Rhoa said.

Weeks after the Aug. 14 assault, another youth told a school counselor he had been victimized by Falcone on Aug. 13, Rhoa said. No charges were filed in that case.

Rhoa said he conferred with the victims, their parents and police before offering Falcone a plea agreement.

“We debated all the issues,” he told the court, and all agreed that a plea bargain was appropriate because it would protect the community while sparing the victims from testifying.

During his long treatment in the juvenile system that aimed to rehabilitate, Rhoa said, “it was all about Gideon.

“Today it’s about the public, those victims and their parents and what we want.”

Originally charged with 17 felony counts alleging assaults on four victims, Falcone was ordered to stand trial as an adult after a two-part waiver hearing in the trial court’s Family Division.

Falcone’s 23 months of treatment in the juvenile system as a sexual offender included placement in a residential program, counseling and other services at a cost of \$65,000.

Juvenile Court officials testified during the waiver hearing that there were no other services to help Falcone. Family Division Judge John Donahue found that the boy was not amenable to further treatment and ordered him to

face trial as an adult.

Under terms of a plea agreement, 15 counts were dismissed in exchange for Falcone's plea of guilty to first-degree CSC and seconddegree CSC. Before imposing sentence, Wiley recounted prior crimes on Falcone's record, among them a shotgun assault on two young victims when he was 11.

During the waiver hearing on the Aug. 14 incidents, victims testified that Falcone ran into some boys he knew at the Berrien County Youth Fair and invited four to his house for a sleepover.

At his grandparents' home in New Troy, Falcone shut himself in an upstairs bedroom with the boys, barricaded the door, threatened and struck them with a fire poker, then forced them to perform oral sex on him.

The boys later told their parents, and state police investigated.

"It is my belief that these young boys were enticed by you for the very purpose of performing these sexual acts," Wiley told Falcone.



Church receives grant for mentoring program

Hometown Headlines

BURTON

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

Journal Staff Writer

BURTON - Ebenezer Ministries has received a \$14,261 grant to assist its mentoring program for at-risk boys aged 8-18.

A check was donated by Ronald McDonald House Charities of Outstate Michigan for the church's "Save our Sons" program. Under the program started last August, about 75 youths meet with mentors each Sunday morning at the church for roundtable discussions on pressures that affect their lives.

Ronald McDonald House Charities assist local agencies and programs that directly improve the health and well-being of children, according to a news release. Founded in 1990, the Outstate group has awarded grants totaling more than \$4 million to more than 350 Michigan organizations. Ebenezer Ministries expects to spend part of its grant for computers and software.

- George Jaksa

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No leeway in teen crime

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

A KID COMMITS FIRST degree murder. Authorities convict him. Should he spend the rest of his life in prison without any chance for parole?

A recent Associated Press article focused on just that, using Michael L. Perry of Saginaw as the example. In 1990, Perry was 16 when he firebombed a home on Jordan in retaliation for a petty confrontation earlier. Three youngsters -- 11, 9 and 7 -- died.

After his conviction, state law gave then-Saginaw County Circuit Judge Leopold P. Borrello two -- and only two -- sentencing choices: Treat Perry as a juvenile, which guaranteed his prison release by 21, or treat him as an adult, lock him up and throw away the key.

Borrello clearly sought some middle sentencing ground but the law handcuffed him, so he decided to throw away the key -- although he did recommend that after 20 years the governor consider him for a reprieve, commutation or pardon.

That 20-year mark is coming up for Perry, who says he's sorry and rehabilitated, and he's getting his freedom petition ready.

With the U.S. Supreme Court having decided two years ago that sentencing juveniles to death is unconstitutional, a movement is growing to take another look at life without parole sentences for the 2,381 people in U.S. prisons for crimes committed when they were 17 or younger.

The rationale, the article indicates, is that if we believe judgment of juveniles is lacking and that they can learn from their mistakes, it's not right to lock them up for life.

Well, that depends.

It's difficult to argue with Saginaw County Prosecutor Michael D. Thomas, who says that where a teen's physical and mental maturity are evident, accountability is absolutely necessary to protect the public and see justice done. And, he says, juveniles convicted of the really bad stuff are the worst of the worst and the penalty does fit the crime.

Think about it. Your son and two daughters are dead at the hand of a fire-bomber. Can you forgive? Do you ask -- is it even right to ask -- the judge to let the killer out of prison in five years?

What about the killer's buddies or other potential juvenile offenders? What kind of message do they get?

And what about your neighbors? Do they feel safe knowing a kid can get away with murder?

In the interest of some compassion here -- and acknowledging the horrible judgment that otherwise good teens can sometimes exercise -- maybe our lawmakers should take a look at some middle ground that gives judges a little leeway in sentencing. Colorado, for instance, makes juveniles eligible for parole after 40 years and a special clemency board reviews the cases.

Or, make mandatory Borrello's recommendation for the governor to consider a reprieve, commutation or pardon after 20 years.

In any case, given his two choices in the Perry case, Borrello picked the right one.

Universal health coverage sought

Petition to ask voters to amend state constitution

December 19, 2007

BY DAWSON BELL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A campaign that claims support from key Michigan labor and religious groups, the AARP and Lt. Gov. John Cherry plans to launch a petition drive next month to ask Michigan voters to approve statewide, universal health care.

The coalition would amend the state constitution to require the Legislature to enact "affordable and comprehensive health care coverage" in the same way the constitution mandates state support of free public education.

Advertisement

Health Care for Michigan, headed by former state Rep. John Freeman, an Oakland County Democrat, is to appear today before a state elections panel to ask for approval of its petition forms. But the campaign is already well under way, spokesman Gary Benjamin said Tuesday. The group's polling shows broad popular support for the idea, he said.

The amendment would "create a duty to provide health care coverage for everyone," Benjamin said. "But it's not a plan; it's a constitutional amendment."

An estimated 850,000 to 1.1 million Michiganders do not have health care insurance.

Benjamin said passage of the amendment would create political pressure for the Legislature to act and a legal standing to compel action if political pressure wasn't enough.

Steve Gools, Michigan director for the AARP, said passage of the ballot proposal would be the organization's top state priority in 2008, and that it was prepared to put \$100,000 into the campaign.

AARP members, including many enrolled in Medicare for older citizens, won't necessarily benefit directly, Gools said, but "their concern is not so much for themselves as it is about their kids and grandkids."

He said the organization isn't wedded to a specific plan. Nor does universal coverage mean a government takeover of health care, he said; it just means that everyone is covered.

But the broad language proposed for the constitution is exactly what concerned Bob LaBrant, an elections specialist at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce.

"Affordable is in the eye of the beholder ... and comprehensive is a term of art," LaBrant said.

A constitutional amendment mandating health care coverage for every citizen could eventually mean that "we all get plastic surgery," he said.

Benjamin said coalition members believe universal coverage can be achieved without adding to the overall cost of health care in Michigan. Michigan health care costs about \$60 billion a year, or \$6,000 per person, Benjamin said, easily enough to provide coverage to the state's 10 million residents.

The campaign will need to collect the signatures of more than 380,000 registered voters to put the issue on the November ballot. Benjamin said the group's goal is 475,000 signatures in all to provide room for error, at a cost approaching \$1 million.

A spokeswoman for Gov. Jennifer Granholm said the governor is considering the proposal.

Granholm supports the goal of universal, affordable care, but has not taken a position, spokeswoman Liz Boyd said. Boyd said she was not aware that Lt. Gov. Cherry's name was listed among the endorsements on a Web site linked to the campaign.

The Web site, www.michuhcan.com, also lists the Service Employees International Union and the faith-based Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength among the campaign's supporters.

A state plan would be among the first in the country and could be modeled after similar state-mandated coverage in Massachusetts.

Contact **DAWSON BELL** at 313-222-6604 or dbell@freepress.com.

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Wednesday, December 19, 2007

KIDS HELPING KIDS: Gleaners program teaches value of volunteering

Shawn D. Lewis / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Anthony Kish stuffed whole-grain crackers, bottles of juice and other healthful treats into red mesh bags that will hold snacks for needy children in after-school programs across Metro Detroit.

"I feel I don't need to be the only one who has food, and I don't think people should suffer," said Anthony, who lives in Redford. "It makes me feel proud of myself to help out in this way."

Anthony, 14, a student at Eton Academy in Birmingham, was participating in a school project at the Gleaners Community Food Bank. After listening to a presentation on hunger awareness, Anthony and his Eton classmates formed an assembly line, filling the bags and stacking them onto pallets. It is part of Gleaners' Kids Helping Kids Program, designed to encourage the idea of sharing and helping those less fortunate.

About 95 percent of the snack bags will go to Detroit schools, and the rest are donated to schools in Warren, Taylor and Pontiac, according to Carmen Mattia, director of special projects at Gleaners, the third oldest food bank in the United States.

Eton Academy in Birmingham caters to students with diagnosed learning differences such as dyslexia.

Marilyn Bloom, the social studies department chair, said it is important for their students to volunteer.

"All students in our upper school take part in community service during parts of the year," she said. "We feel it is important to go beyond the self to contribute to communities they live in. A lot of them have never been to Detroit and are surprised by the amount of hunger that exists here."

According to statistics from Gleaners, 34 percent of the people who rely on food banks in Michigan are children.

Emily Litwin, 17, of Franklin hopes her participation will help a few of those children.

"It is important because I want to feed the kids who aren't as fortunate as me," she said. "It feels good knowing they will have food for the holidays."

You can reach Shawn D. Lewis at (248) 647-8825 or slewis@detnews.com

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Nearly 180 boxes distributed through annual Christmas Basket Project

December 19, 2007

By Trinity Bird-Staff Writer



Trinity Bird / The Reporter

Many volunteers, including members of the Union City High School National Honor Society, above, delivered nearly 180 boxes of food to residents of Union City, Sherwood

and Burlington as part of the community's annual Christmas Basket Project.

UNION CITY — The communities of Union City, Sherwood and Burlington have once again come together to provide food, winter clothes and gifts for those in need during the holidays.

Each year, items are collected, boxed and distributed through the First Congregational Church in Union City using donations of goods and monetary donations from the community. In previous years, as many as 140 boxes have been distributed, but this year's drive hit an all-time high of nearly 180 boxes.

"It truly is the kindness of the people in the Union City community," according to Susan Gibson, project co-chair. "The people of Union City, Burlington and Sherwood have made an incredible effort."

The boxes include traditional food drive items, as well as specific items, including toiletries. Boxes contain cereal, canned goods, bread, gravy, potatoes and this year each delivery included a Butterball turkey.

The gifts part of the project is done by local banks, churches and business that adopt specific families. Working with Toys for Tots, last year's toy drive provided 75 bags of toys for local residents.

The Congregational Church also holds a hat and glove drive to collect winter clothing items for distribution. Items are collected on a tree in the church's fellowship hall.

All of the collected items were boxed on Friday evening by volunteers. According to Gibson, the amount of volunteers who came to help box the items was so overwhelming that everything was done in 45 minutes. Volunteers included many local boy scout troupes.

Saturday morning the distribution began. Members of local churches, business people and members of the Union City High School National Honor Society loaded the items into trucks, vans and cars for delivery. With the amount of help, the distribution took approximately four hours.

The boxes go to elderly members of the community as well as families in need. Most of the families helped by the project have children who attend Union City schools.

The boxes are loaded according to the amount of people in each household. Households this year ranged in size from two people to ten people. Those receiving the items come from recommendations from the schools, community members and local organizations.

Now that this year's project is almost finished, plans begin for next year.

The Community Christmas Project can be reached by mailing P.O. Box 32 in Union City.



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Salvation Army giveaway aids local families in need

Salvation Army schedules 1,000 appointments as demand grows

By Catherine Kavanaugh
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

ROYAL OAK - Cynthia Miles of Ferndale filled a shopping cart Tuesday with presents for her 6-month-old granddaughter while her personal shopping assistant threw in a spa kit and other items she would like.

Miles then rolled the packed cart out the door compliments of The Salvation Army's Royal Oak Citadel. It's toy shop time again at the Main Street church.

"This will help make for a merry Christmas," Miles, 60, said, as she wished volunteer helper Connie Acton of Royal Oak a blessed holiday.

Miles is on a fixed income raising baby Brooklyn. She said she learned about the toy giveaway from a neighbor who also is experiencing hard times. They are among 1,000 families, senior citizens and disabled individuals eligible for free toys, clothes and food through noon Thursday. That's an increase of 100 people over last year.

Katherine Giddey, director of community ministries at The Salvation Army Royal Oak Citadel, said there was a 50 percent increase in first-time shoppers this year.

"A lot of families are suffering from layoffs," Giddey said. "We even have appointments for professional business people with master's degrees. They are overqualified for some jobs and in fierce competition with people for other jobs."

The toy giveaway continues today and ends at noon Thursday. Giddey said she can make a few appointments for parents in emergency situations. Some people scheduled for the free shopping spree on Monday cancelled after every school district in Oakland County declared a snow day.

"They had to stay home with their children," Giddey said, adding that she defines emergency as not being able to afford any Christmas gifts for children.

All year The Salvation Army has been collecting toys and clothes from schools, Scouts, Toys for Tots and William Beaumont Hospital. Miles said she was impressed with all of the tables covered with hats, mittens, socks, games, books and action figures for children up to age 14.

"It's hard to choose," Miles said while looking at a clothes rack of baby and toddler sleepers, rompers and dresses.

Acton pointed out a pretty pink outfit.

"Isn't that Zsa Zsa," she said of the beaded top with ruffled pants.

However, it was too small for Brooklyn. Miles picked practical clothes made of fleece and terry cloth. She also selected a Winnie the Pooh rattle, a board book, and a lavender scented rag doll with a label that says it soothes babies.

"Brooklyn is a beautiful, very happy child but she gets fussy at times at night or when she's hungry," Miles said.

For grandma, Acton put a bag in the cart with a blanket, pillow and spa kit. On her way out, another volunteer added a large box of food. The volunteers said the toy shop is a rewarding place to give their time.

"It warms your heart," Acton said. "The Salvation Army is so good and dependable. It's always here like a security blanket."

Giddey wants to extend the security blanket to as many people as possible. To make an appointment for an emergency visit to the toy shop, call The Salvation Army at (248) 585-5600.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

SALVATION ARMY TOY SHOP NEEDS DONATIONS

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

With less than a week to go before Christmas, the local Salvation Army badly needs donations of toys for needy children. The Salvation Army's Toy Shop for Families expects to serve about 3,000 children over the next three days but has "less than 500 toys to give," Capt. Tom McComb, corps officer at the Kalamazoo Salvation Army, said in a news release.

TO DONATE -- Take new, unwrapped toys to The Salvation Army,

1700 S. Burdick St.

WHEN -- Today to

9 p.m., 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday and Friday, 8:30 a.m. to noon Monday.

DEADLINE -- Dec. 24, but toys received after Friday won't get to kids until after Christmas.

FOR MORE

INFORMATION -- 344-6119.

-- Gazette

Staff

Reports

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